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ABSTRACT

This journal issue features a review of the edited volume, "Building a Professional Culture in Schools," and an interview with Charles Thompson, the associate dean for clinical studies at Michigan State University's College of Education. The review discusses the book's three major sections: one arguing for new professional roles for teachers; a second describing recent efforts in this direction; and a third focusing on obstacles to promoting pervasive change in schools. The interview, "On the Development of Professional Development Schools," presents professional development schools (PDS) as more than sites for preparing new teachers. They are also settings for creating a new form of education that reflects the kind of teaching and learning needed to respond to the social, demographic, and economic realities of the late 20th- and 21st-century United States. The interview also discusses organizational changes needed to facilitate changes in teaching and learning, and stresses the collaborative nature of PDS, emphasizing the contribution of each partner (the public school and the university) to the joint venture. (IAH)

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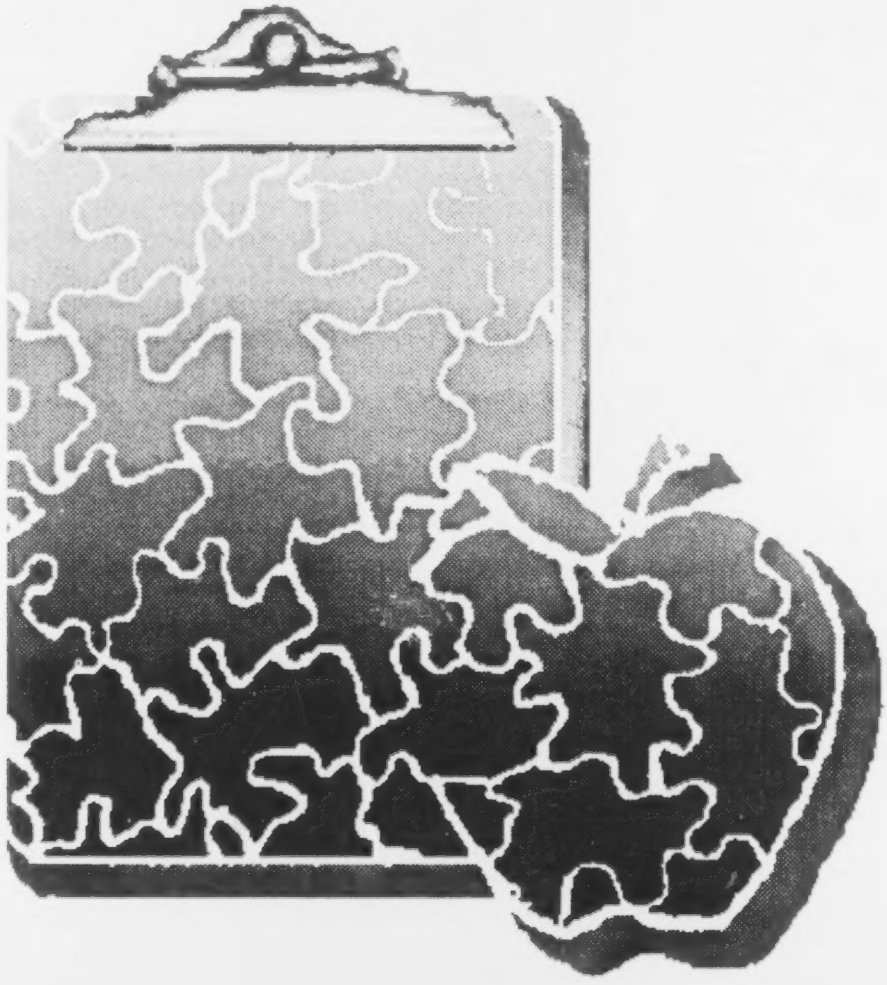

Professional Development Schools

by Mary M. Kennedy, Director

SP 032 752

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Book Review of Building a Professional Culture in Schools

On the Development of Professional Development Schools
Interview with Charles Thompson

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Setting Teachers Free

A review of Building a Professional Culture in Schools
Ann Lieberman, Editor
Teachers College Press, 1988. $27.95

Much of the wisdom of the 1960s was recorded on sidewalks and buildings. Once, on a trash can, I read this piece of wisdom: "You can't be free if you have to ask The Man to set you free." I have always wondered if this is true.

This is the dilemma facing the current movement to "professionalize" teachers. Those who would professionalize teaching want The Man to remove the current mass of regulations that govern teachers, but they also want teachers to become different kinds of people: people who use their professional judgments to make decisions that are appropriate to their particular school context, who study and improve their own practices, and who are willing to monitor and regulate themselves and their peers. There are many good reasons for proposing such a change, not the least of which is that it is turning out to be not very practical to standardize education.

Yet this reform receives much of its momentum not from teachers in schools, but from people outside of schools--in professional associations and in colleges and universities. Can teachers be free if these others have to set them free? On the other hand, how can teachers begin to regulate themselves if others do not set them free?

Teachers Should be Sources of Reform

An excellent resource for those interested in this new reform is Ann Lieberman's edited volume, *Building a Professional Culture in Schools*. Its authors are uncomfortably aware that they are not, for the most part, teachers; yet they are committed to the idea that teachers should be able to develop and monitor their own practices. As the title indicates, these authors also believe that this new responsibility cannot simply be bestowed on teachers, for teachers are not accustomed to such a role. The task, as they see it, is that of altering school cultures so that teachers not only are willing to accept responsibility for their own actions, but seek out such responsibility and strive to improve their practices and to improve the practices of their colleagues.

The book has three major sections: one arguing why we should develop new professional roles for teachers; the second describing examples of recent efforts in this direction; and the third containing a single paper responding to all the rest. The first section is persuasive, the second and third disheartening, because some of the efforts to alter teachers' roles created serious strains for teachers and others did not yield substantial changes in educational practice.

The Case for Professionalism

The first section includes papers by Kathleen Devaney and Gary Sykes, Milbrey McLaughlin and Sylvia Mei-ling Yee, Myrna Cooper, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Judith Little. The arguments they bring to the case for professionalism include the following:

- Research on teaching and learning has now demonstrated that teaching is sufficiently complex that it cannot be standardized. Instead, much of what matters in teaching must be decided *in situ*, on the basis of circumstances of the moment.

- Schools are designed for upward career advancement, that is, for advancement from teaching to principalship to other administrative positions; yet most teachers desire career recognition without advancements; that is, like doctors, architects, or lawyers, they want to be recognized within their first line of work rather than by moving out of that line of work.

- Each school has its own inherent culture and its own relationships among teachers, administrators, and students, and these realities are often either not understood or overlooked altogether by outsiders.

- Accountability to the public can be accomplished through regulating admission into the profession and permitting the profession to oversee its own members, rather than by using state regulations to dictate practice.

- The current culture of schools, which encourages working in isolation, avoiding criticism of one's peers, and avoiding exposure of one's own practices inhibits opportunities to learn and to improve practice.

These arguments are remarkably different from one another; yet all do imply that things might improve if teachers took more control, and more critical control, of their own practices. They suggest professionalization as a solution to the career desires of teachers, to the isolation of teaching and the egalitarian culture of teaching, to the difficulty of standardizing practices when schools and students are so different, and to the complexity of the task of teaching.

What is remarkable about them as a set is that they speak very little about professionalization as a solution to the problem of improving the quality of teaching in schools. These arguments focus mainly on organization and management, not on teaching and learning. Very little effort is made to persuade us that teaching practices would be improved by professionalizing teachers. This is not to say that the arguments are not compelling in their own various ways. The section as a whole is quite persuasive.

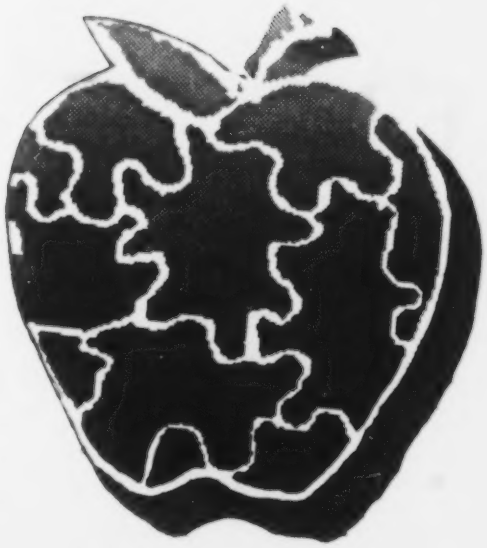
Altering School Structures

The second section of the book includes papers by Holly Houston, Roland Barth, Lynn Miller, Phillip Schlechty, and Ann Lieberman, Ellen Saxl and Matthew Miles. Each of these papers describes a particular effort to alter one or more school structures in some way. Houston's paper describes the experiences of two schools that are members of the Coalition of Essential Schools; Barth describes his own experiences as a principal; Lieberman and her colleagues describe findings from a study of 17 teachers who were expected to play the role of teacher leaders; Miller describes efforts of a school district to alter district-school relations; and Schlechty describes the effort of the Charlotte-Mechlenberg Schools to create a teacher career development program.

These chapters make for particularly useful and interesting reading. Though they are optomistic abut their goals, they are still relatively honest descriptions of difficult undertakings. They show the problems as well as the promise. Most of all, they also show us the awful heart of the matter: that such efforts are enormously difficult to undertake, that they

create tremendous strains on all participants, that their successes is middling at best and that these successes, such as they are, are still fragile, still very capable of being overwhelmed by their environments.

The third section of the book tempers our enthusiasm even more. It contains an afterword by Harry Judge, in which Judge lists numerous obstacles to promoting pervasive changes in schools, not the least of which include our democratic ideal of community control over schools. Yet, despite the problems exposed in these essays, the feeling one takes away from the book is that such changes can be made. They will be difficult; the path will be more treacherous than we might have thought before, but there are passable routes, and we need to pursue them.



On the Development of Professional Development Schools

An Interview with Charles Thompson

Charles Thompson is associate dean for clinical studies at Michigan State University's College of Education. One of his primary duties in that role is to promote the development of a network of professional development schools.

What does it mean to be associate dean for "clinical studies"?

The clinical studies metaphor comes from medicine, specifically from the College of Human Medicine here at MSU, where the clinical education of doctors takes place in community hospitals at six or seven locations around the state. The relationships with community hospitals are in lieu of having a single teaching hospital. So the title suggests a complex organization that engages in (a) care for patients, (b) the preparation of new practitioners, and (c) research. And the analogy in education is that we're dealing with the education of K-12 students, with the education of new educators and the continuing education of people already in service, and with research.

In addition to all that, we're concerned about the kinds of changes in schools as organizations, and in the college as an organization that will have to be made if we want to transform teaching and learning for K-12 students, on the one hand, and for new educators and teachers who are already in service, on the other. So, as associate dean for clinical studies, my responsibility is to coordinate our efforts to create settings that are parallel in many ways to these community teaching hospitals that the MSU College of Human Medicine has already established.

And these are called? . . .

Professional development schools. Which is an odd name in some ways, I mean usually when people hear the term professional development schools, they think that the sole function is the professional development of teachers who are in service, but our intent is much broader than that. The other piece that's important is that there are a number of important organizational changes that need to be made in order to facilitate these changes in teaching and learning, both for kids and for teacher candidates.

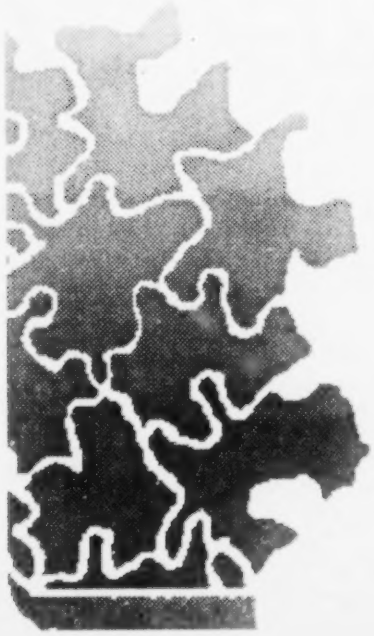
What kind of changes are those?

If you're going to make any serious changes in teaching and learning for K-12 students for example, and if you believe that research, fairly broadly construed, can serve as the basis for reconsidering practice, then it's clear that teachers in these schools need to have more time to think and reexamine their own practice, and they need to have some forums for that. Making time for this is a real problem in itself.

And there needs to be substantial room to maneuver, the possibility of suspending normal routing and approaches. So both within the school and in terms of its relationship to the university, a variety of organizational and institutional changes have to be made in order to make any changes at all in teaching and learning. The linkage between the improvement of teaching and learning on one side and school organization and management on the other is a very important and somewhat underdiscussed linkage as we think about school reform. Too many discussions, it seems to me, start from the question of structure and management, rather than from the question of teaching and learning.

Are you referring to conversations about, for instance, restructuring schools?

Yes. A lot of those discussions center around things like the apportionment of representation on boards, and they almost never get to the question of why and how you might want to teach people anything differently than before. I think that's a mistake. Although it's seldom made very effectively, there *is* a good argument for professionalism based on the nature of educational practice.



But what's the argument that says if you change the school organization in particular ways, which might be described as professionalizing the school, that those changes will improve teaching in the ways that seem *appropriate*, given economic and societal conditions? If you were clear on what you were trying to do—the goals, problems, objectives and so on—and if you had a known set of procedures which could be well-specified which would generate those outcomes, then you would want a system which restricted discretion and autonomy. You would want people to behave in these very predictable ways which are known to produce the outcomes that you want.

But if you are in a sphere of practice where the problems and goals are themselves fairly rich and complex, and in which there is no set of procedures which can be run off to produce the outcomes you want predictably—in fact, there are always novel problems being posed in education—then you need a culture and a structure in the organization which enables people to draw on each other and on outside sources of knowledge to address these difficult, complex problems. It seems to me that is the situation that we're in in education and that's the logic for a professional organization rather than a bureaucratic organization. Brian Rowan—the chair of our Department of Educational Administration—makes a similar argument very well, though I don't know if Brian comes out where I do on the specific matter of professionalism.

O.K., then maybe you should talk about what kind of teaching and learning changes you think are necessary, in light of the social and demographic changes you see.

Let me start with the latter and then come to the teaching question. To prosper in late 20th- and 21st-century America, people are going to have to be on-the-job thinkers and lifetime learners, not just doers. Virtually nobody will be able to earn a decent living by simply carrying out routine processes in a predictable way, day after day and year

after year. Many jobs will require high levels of understanding in mathematics and science—I'm not just talking about engineers here, I'm also talking about the new assembly line worker, the new mechanic, the new construction worker, and lots of others.

Most jobs will require high levels of communication skill—in writing as well as in speech. To be full citizens in this technologically advanced democracy, people will have to understand complex, dynamic systems of all sorts. And finally, no matter how much anybody learns, it will never be enough. We'll all need the skills and the motivation to go on learning, to keep pace with the relentless process of change. So that sets a new standard for the kind of education that it takes to participate in the workplace, to participate in the economy successfully.

And then, at the same time, you've got many more of the kinds of kids which schools have not been able to educate very well in the past, even at the basic level—kids from poverty-level homes, minority kids, children of teenage mothers, the whole array of "at-risk" kids. That segment is growing rapidly. So you've got this collision course between elevated demands from the economy, on the one hand, and demographic trends, on the other. They pose a terrific challenge for schools. It means not just "let's do a better job of educating more students up to some basic level." If we want to have an adequate work force for the economy of the future, we have to change the nature of the education that we're providing students and we have to bring kids whom we're failing even on a basic level up to a much higher level.

Then you see the professional development school as much more than a site for preparing new teachers, it's a site for creating a whole different . . .

For creating a new kind of education. PDSs [professional development schools] provide a place to figure out what it takes to provide that kind of education, and not just to figure it out in the abstract but to figure it out through action. I see that as the really fundamental challenge. If you could create some settings in which the education required for a 21st-century economy and democracy were in place, and if you had the kinds of organizational structure and norms and so forth to support that, then those settings would become the ideal places in which to educate new teachers and new administrators.

And are you succeeding do you think, in creating schools like you've just described?

Well, we're starting. This is not a two-year or even five-year or for that matter, ten-year undertaking. I think we're succeeding in getting some places engaged in this task, and we're learning a lot about what it takes for university people and school people to collaborate in addressing this task.

Given the size of the gap that you've portrayed between a current school and the kind of a school you'd like to see, and given the difficulty of even defining how to get there from here, how do you persuade a school that it should try to do this?

It hasn't been difficult, actually. There are a lot of teachers who would very much like to move in these directions. The kind of vision I'm trying to sketch is very consistent with many teachers' aspirations already. There's a very experienced cohort of teachers out in schools now—people that have 15, 20 years of experience—and when they have a genuine opportunity to address this gap between their aspirations and where schools are now, that's powerfully motivating for many of these experienced teachers. If not initially, then certainly when they begin to believe that we're serious about working in a collaborative way with them and providing the kind of reallocated time and support and long-term relationship that it would take to achieve this, then it just unleashes a tremendous amount of energy and commitment among teachers.

Can you give an example of the type of project that people are trying to develop or type of new ideas people are trying out in these schools?

Let's take a math example: The National Council for the Teaching of Mathematics has created a set of research-based standards and guidelines for teaching mathematics. They are quite general, but call for quite deep changes. So in one of our schools there's a group, consisting of MSU faculty and school faculty, that's looking at current mathematics practice, curriculum and instruction in light of the NCTM standards, asking things like: Do we believe these standards are right? If we believe these standards are right, what are the implications for us? How might we begin to make some changes in the curriculum and teaching methods of the school?

They are taking a critical look at their own teaching, taking some remarkable risks—inviting university professors as well as their own colleagues to observe their teaching. This is deeply counter to the norms of autonomy and "live and let live" that tend to characterize most of the schools and a lot of universities as well. And we have a number of projects within that school that are doing similar things.

And the people doing the study are both faculty and teachers, and they decide together on what to study and how to study it?

That's right. The change process in these schools is a process of negotiation. Negotiation is an activity in which it's legitimate for the university people to have a set of beliefs and values and perspectives, and it's also legitimate for the school people to have their own beliefs, values, and so on. The process is one of trying to create some common standards and some common culture through discussion and negotiation.

Do you find that school people are inclined to set aside the university concerns as being too "ivory tower"?

That's the perception that greets us when we come in the door, initially, but when you have people like Andy Anderson [a faculty member at Michigan State] talking about conceptual change teaching and science and able to demonstrate his ideas by working with K-12 kids and you have Maggie Lampert [also at Michigan State] talking about teaching for understanding in mathematics and able to demonstrate it and

in fact teaching it five days a week in a school, they soon gain real credibility. So it isn't long before teachers are willing to listen to what the university people have to say in these negotiations.

What would you do if you started a relationship with a school and it moved along and as the teachers started forming their own goals, you found that those goals were substantially different from your own?

We'd have to withdraw. If as a result of discussion and negotiations over a period of time there wasn't some convergence, then we'd have to withdraw. This is a very important point because what happens in these negotiations is a substantial reframing of everybody's conception of what's needed. There's one tradition of involvement in schools which says you go in and identify the needs that the teachers in the schools feel and you try to respond to those. I'm not saying that we don't do that—we do—but we don't leave it at that. A "need" is not a found object. It's a construction. It's a discrepancy between the way people *believe* things ought to be and the way they *perceive* them to be at a given time. We have our framework of belief, just as teachers do. And we spend a lot of time working at the level of beliefs before we even take on any specific "need" or "problem."

But the kind of change you're trying to create could be very risky for teachers. It could be threatening. And I'm wondering, what is the risk for you? Is there an equal risk on your side?

It sure feels risky; we could fall flat on our faces. I mean if we go in with the proposition that research has something to offer, we have to make good on that proposition. We have to actually be able to show how this can be helpful. It feels as though we have as much as stake in creating some new modes of teaching and learning as the teachers do. The reciprocal of this, of course, is that teachers have some strong beliefs about how teacher education ought to be changed, and we have to open ourselves up to influence in that sphere as much as teachers are willing to open themselves to influence in teaching and learning for K-12 students.

We've got at least one school where we've opened our teacher-education program up to inspection, discussion, challenge, change and so forth, much more than the school has been willing to open up K-12 instruction to the same sort of inspection and challenge and change. And rather than being bad thing, that's a good thing. It makes me feel better to know that there will inevitably be phases in which one or the other of the partners has gone farther in opening up their area of primary responsibility to examination. The university people trust the school people to educate our teacher-education candidates in ways that are consistent with our values and our beliefs because we've been through this process with them.

You've talked both about how research can contribute to practice and about the idea that these settings become research settings. On one side you're bringing a body of research in your briefcase, but on the other side, you're saying you don't really know how to get there from here, so we need to work together to do research . . .

The easiest way to illustrate this is in the research on science education over the last decade or so. We now know a good deal about kids' understandings and misunderstandings in such areas as heat, temperature, light and shadow, weight and density, photosynthesis, and so on, and we know that kids construct their own theories about these matters. If you look inside kids' minds you don't find faithful replications of scientific theory, you find constructions that come out of their own way of making sense of their own experience. They might have some labels—some *vocabulary*—that come from school, but their thinking is a messy mixture of their own made-up ideas and half-understood bits of scientific theory. So we know something about kids' thinking in these areas, and we know something about how their thinking changes.

But that really just poses the problem. That doesn't tell you *what to do* when you face a classroom of 27 kids who have all constructed some set of ideas in science that are probably quite different from each other. So the question is, suppose we come into some classrooms, and suppose the teachers in those classrooms were persuaded that indeed this research does have something to say to them? They'll soon recognize that we're up against a serious problem together. It's addressing that problem, that educational challenge—that's the kind of inquiry we're engaged in. One of the nice things about this is that it places a problem out there which both school faculty and university faculty are looking at together, and so they're not just confronting each other, they're confronting some common problems. In the process they've got to confront each other to a certain extent, but it puts the focus on an objective set of problems out in the world that both groups are trying to solve and each brings certain resources to the table in order to solve this problem.

This conversation reminds me of another buzzword that's popular right now: the teacher-researcher. Is that something that you strive for in a professional development school?

It depends on what's meant by that. If you just mean that you're going to prepare teachers in the usual research methodologies so they can do research that's a little like the research that university people do, only less so; that's not a particularly productive route to go. If you're talking about teachers as people who have a lot of experience and insight and intelligence to bring to bear on difficult questions about educational practice, then I think that's a worthwhile undertaking. We're not just teaching teachers research design and statistics—that would be silly.

Suppose I were an elementary school principal, not here in East Lansing but out in, say, rural Michigan, and I had thought about these societal changes that you described and I wanted to radically alter the kind of education that my school was providing. Could I develop a professional development school?

The way we define "professional development school" you really couldn't do that by yourself.

Why?

Because for us a professional development school is a joint venture by a regular public school and a university or a college of education to address these new educational challenges. This is not just a definitional problem. I want to make the claim that you can't elevate education to a new level without bringing both of these resources together.

Why? Why couldn't I . . .?

Well what's your theory? What's your theory about what's going to bring about the change? I'll tell you what my theory is. You're going to need to change the circumstances of work such that teachers have more room to think about these problems and more motivation to do so. And you have to see to it that their energy gets mobilized. You do need energy to drive the change process. But you also need new *knowledge* in the system. I really believe that university people can bring new knowledge to the venture, which schools, left to their own devices, simply don't have. This *isn't* to say we have all the answers. But we do have some new perspectives and insights. When you *combine* what university people bring with the experience and practical knowledge that teachers have, you get powerful new educational approaches that neither one could produce alone.

Suppose I subscribe to some research journals, and suppose my teachers are interested enough that they would read these?

I don't think it would work. To get to the kind of understanding that some of our faculty have requires a background of a dozen or 15 years of study, and there's a depth of understanding and a richness of understanding and an ability to bring those ideas to bear on new problems, which is developed through that process, that simply can't be reproduced by having people read their articles. You can take all of the best research reports and summarize them very nicely and give teachers half of their time for a year to read them. They still will not get to the same level of understanding that an experienced researcher has achieved over a 12- to 15-year period of work. You need a person who has not only mastered the research at a conceptual level, but who also has expertise in applying it, bringing it to bear on practice in a broad range of contexts, of situations. Only someone who's done that can see the relevance and power of the research in concrete teaching situations.

I suppose you could argue also that the university faculty needs school faculty for the same reason because if you sat down as a university faculty member and read all the research about schools and classrooms and how they function, you wouldn't have the same depth of understanding that teachers have.

That's right. Absolutely right. That's what I meant earlier when I said you needed to *combine* the resources that each brings to the table.

Suppose I were a college faculty member or an associate dean at some other college. How would I go about trying to convince schools to work with me on something like this?

I think there's a prior question, which is whether you could persuade other people within the college or university itself that this would be a worthwhile enterprise to dedicate some time and energy to. It takes a while—it took a while for us to articulate what we're really trying to achieve and be able to say it simply and clearly enough that teachers could hear that message and be persuaded that we really meant what we said. It took us probably a year and a half of discussions to persuade the teacher organizations and administration that this would be a worthwhile enterprise. So you have to be in it for the long haul—that's a pretty long preliminary, and you have to justify putting that kind of energy into preliminary discussions, you have to have a commitment to an enduring relationship.

You mentioned earlier that you thought that faculty working in these schools had some credibility to start with because many of them were themselves teaching in K-12 situations or could demonstrate ideas by teaching themselves. Now if I were this associate dean in some other college and I didn't have any faculty who were teaching in K-12 settings, what kind of incentives could I create at the college level to try and alter their practice?

There are two or three kinds of incentives, it seems to me. Probably the most general and compelling incentives have to do with intellectual respect and esteem. If it becomes intellectually respectable to engage in this sort of thing, then people will be willing to do it. Provided then you take the next step, which is to allocate a significant portion of their time to do it. If you're not willing to allocate quarter time or better to a faculty member to work in schools, then there's not much hope that you're going to make any serious impact, even with that one person. I would recommend networking with places that are beginning to engage in this, making some visits, talking with people, getting people to visit your own college, sharing reports on this kind of activity—in order to enhance it's intellectual respectability—and build some prestige for it.

Then, beyond allocating time and intellectual prestige, there's the question of whether provision for this kind of activity is going to get built into promotion and tenure considerations. But unless you work on the norms about what's intellectually prestigious to do you won't get anywhere on the rules and regulations about tenure.

Are there analogous norms in schools that have to change?

Oh yes. The whole process of challenging each other intellectually, criticizing, taking issue with other people, and questioning whether a certain way of teaching is acceptable, that's just not done in most schools. In most schools there's a strong ethic of social harmony, a valuing of social relationships to such an extent that taking issue with another

person would be considered extremely rude and disruptive of the whole fabric of the school. And the ethic of social harmony, plus the ethic of autonomy in the classroom, means that it's extremely difficult, even within a school, to say nothing between a school and university, to really examine practice together in a serious way.

O.K., now you have talked about the need for faculty who are motivated to work in schools and who see this as intellectually important, and the need for a university culture that values that kind of work. You've talked about the need to have school norms where asking questions is acceptable. You've talked about the need to scrutinize the education system and to try and make major changes in it. You've talked about teacher education happening in that context. You've talked about professional development happening in that context. You've talked about the need for collaboration, you've talked about the need for negotiation. There are a lot of elements in your formula. Which of those is most important? Can you identify one or two elements that are central to the whole enterprise?

Thank you.

Maybe. It's a long-term process, something people are going to learn to do together over a very long period of time. I guess maybe that is an overall consideration. All of the things that you mentioned are crucial; I don't see how you can talk about creating a new kind of institution that delivers a new kind of education and a new kind of education of educators, without all of them. It's very complicated. It doesn't feel iffy or chancy, though, it feels like solid work. I think people in these schools and in our university faculty are quite confident we can do this. I don't have a sense that people think this is a pipe dream or something that's very fragile. It's a pretty robust undertaking but it's a long-term undertaking.

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